

The Devil and His Poms in Fifth-Century Carthage:  
Renouncing Spectacula with Spectacular Imagery  
*Daniel G. Van Slyke*

**T**HE GREATEST LATIN rhetoricians and moralists tried for centuries to dissuade their fellow Christians from attending public entertainments known as *spectacula* or spectacles. But the very repetition of their appeals indicates that they were on the whole unsuccessful. This study focuses on the battle against spectacles waged during the fifth century in North Africa, especially Carthage, by two prominent bishops: Augustine and Quodvultdeus. The three chief topics investigated regard the grounds for episcopal opposition to spectacles, the means by which bishops opposed such entertainment, and the relation of spectacles to the baptismal liturgy. What were the reasons for the animosity of Christian intellectual and pastoral leaders toward spectacles? With what visual and oratorical imagery did bishops combat the powerful lure of spectacles that so enthralled their congregations? What was the perceived relationship between spectacles and the renunciations uttered by baptismal candidates on the verge of their full initiation into the number of the faithful?

A wide spectrum of entertainment enjoyed by ancient Romans is included under the term *spectacula*: shows in the theater, athletic competitions in the stadium, gladiatorial games, chariot races at the circus, *venationes* or wild beast fights (beasts against beasts or men against beasts) held in the amphitheater, and public executions of criminals.<sup>1</sup> At least until the time of Constantine, many criminals were executed in the amphitheater, often by burning or exposure to wild animals.<sup>2</sup> Roman authorities treated executions as public displays meant to discourage disobedient behavior to such an extent that Latin translations of Luke naturally referred to Jesus's crucifixion as a "spectacle."<sup>3</sup> In Africa beast fights that took place within the amphitheater were so popular that they overshadowed gladiatorial fights by the end of the second century CE,<sup>4</sup> more than a hundred years before gladiators disappeared from other parts of the empire.<sup>5</sup> The chariot races in the circus also remained immensely popular in Africa,<sup>6</sup> and both circus and amphitheater spectacles continued to be offered in Carthage during the Vandal occupation.<sup>7</sup> This study demonstrates that, of all the spectacles, animal sports of the circus and amphitheater had the greatest impact on the verbal and iconographic imagery of African Christianity.<sup>8</sup> How and why did Augustine and Quodvultdeus, Africa's most prominent Christian moralists of the fifth century, attack these two popular forms of entertainment? What can be learned from the spectacles held in Carthage, where Augustine delivered several sermons attacking the shows years after experiencing them there himself?<sup>9</sup>

5 Gladiatorial fights became increasingly rare after Constantine, and seem no longer to have been offered in the West at the end of the 4th century. Gladiatorial schools may have been eliminated because they had proven an effective resource for ambitious usurpers. In 350 Nepotian, an opponent of Magnentius the usurper, used gladiators for a political coup: "Nepotianus deinde Romae, Constantini sororis filius, gladiatorum manu fretus inuasit imperium: qui deinde cum inprobus ac per hoc inuisus cunctis esset, a Magnentianis ducibus oppressus est"; Paul Orosius, *Historiarum adversum paganos* 7.29 (ed. C. Zagemeister, CSEL 5 [Vienna, 1882], 508). On Nepotian, see A. H. M. Jones, J. R. Martindale, and J. Morris, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. 1, AD 260–395 (Cambridge, 1971), 624. According to Theodoret of Cyrrhus, the emperor Honorius outlawed gladiatorial games in 404; *Historia ecclesiastica* 5.26. On the interpretation of this passage, see J. P. Kirsch, "Das Ende der Gladiatorenspele in Rom," *RQ* 26 (1912): 207–11. Following an illuminating analysis, T. Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators* (London, 1992), 160, concludes that the symbolic function of purging threats and restoring order that gladiatorial games fulfilled was simply no longer necessary in the Christian ambience of late antiquity. Economic factors also help to explain their demise—troups of

gladiators were expensive to maintain. R. MacMullen, "What Difference Did Christianity Make?" in *Changes in the Roman Empire: Essays in the Ordinary* (Princeton, N.J., 1990), 147.

6 Picard, *Civilisation*, 226–27 (n. 4 above), and *La Carthage de saint Augustin* (Paris, 1965), 91–97. "The dozens of mosaic pavements that focus on games and spectacles demonstrate a pronounced predilection for the circus and the amphitheater"; H. Slim, "Spectacles," in *Mosaics of Roman Africa: Floor Mosaics from Tunisia*, ed. M. Blanchard-Lemée et al., trans. K. D. Whitehead (New York, 1996), 190.

1 The *noxii* were doomed to die "*summa supplicia*—the worst forms of aggravated capital punishment" at the *meridiani* or midday games. Criminals condemned to the schools of gladiators or beast-fighters (*damnati ad ludum gladiatorium* or *venatorium*) might survive an entry into the arena through victory or *missio*. D. G. Kyle, *Spectacles of Death in Ancient Rome* (New York, 1998), 91, 158. See also K. M. Coleman, "Fatal Charades: Roman Executions Staged as Mythological Enactments," *JRS* 80 (1990): 54–57.

2 "It may have been the custom in Rome for educated Romans to skip the criminal executions that took place at the noon break, but in Carthage such executions were in the tradition of human sacrifice, and as such were extremely popular. In fact, in the provinces the executions sometimes occupied the whole day, forming the main spectacle instead of an interlude. This was likely the case in Carthage"; J. E. Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion: The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman* (New York, 1997), 133–34. In 325 Constantine passed legislation that condemned criminals to work in the mines rather than contend in the games. P. Chuvp, *A Chronicle of the Last Pagans*, trans. B. A. Archer (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), 35.

3 The Greek term here is *θεωπία*. "Et omnis turba, quae simul erat ad spectaculum istud, qui videbant quae fiebant, percutientes pectora sua revertebantur"; Luke 23:48, A. Jülicher, ed., *Itala: Das neue Testament in altlateinischer Überlieferung*, vol. 3, *Lucas-Evangelium* (Berlin, 1976), 267. See also 1 Cor. 4:9, where Paul refers to the apostles as a *θεάτρον*, translated *spectaculum*, like those condemned to death. Cf. Heb. 10:33.

4 G. C. Picard, *La civilisation de l'Afrique romaine*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1990), 221–22, also 249–50. Kyle, *Spectacles of Death*, 184–93, suggests that in Rome animals killed in *venationes* were distributed to the meat-starved populace. If this also occurred in Carthage, it could in part explain the immense popularity of beast fights there.

7 The Latin poet Luxorius lived in Carthage or at least visited the city to attend spectacles in its circus and amphitheater during the first 3rd of the 6th century. H. Happ, *Luxorius: Text und Untersuchungen* (Stuttgart, 1986), 1:83–84. M. Rosenblum, *Luxorius: A Latin Poet among the Vandals* (New York, 1961), 43–45. Luxorius was invested enough in these spectacles to praise or to denigrate certain charioteers and beast-fighters by name. In the following *carmina*, he mentions charioteers or the horse stables of the circus: 306, 312, 320, 324, 327–28, 336, ed. Happ, 1:26, 30, 35, 37–40, 45 (= *Carmina* 301, 307, 315, 319, 322–23, 331, ed. D. R. Shackleton Bailey, *Anthologia latina* [Stuttgart, 1982], 1:248, 251, 255–56, 258, 260, 264–65). On the basis of these poems and one other in the anthology, S. T. Stevens argues that the circus was still active in the early 6th century, although it was on the wane; “The Circus Poems in the Latin Anthology,” in *The Circus and a Byzantine Cemetery at Carthage*, ed. J. H. Humphrey (Ann Arbor, 1988), 1:153–78. Luxorius praises certain beast-fighters in *Carmina* 334–35, 353–54 (lauding a *venator* “quem non Carthaginis arces amphitheatrali potuerunt ferre triumpho!...atque tuum nomen semper Carthago loquetur”), ed. Happ, 1:44–45, 56–58 (= *Carmina* 329–30, 348–49, ed. Shackleton Bailey, 1:264, 273–75). In *Carmen* 346, ed. Happ, 1:51–52 (= *Carmen* 341, ed. Shackleton Bailey, 1:270), Luxorius writes about a new amphitheater built in a country villa during the Vandal period. On this poem, see R. Quaglia, “Traduzione e breve commento ad *Anth. Lat.* 341–42, 346, 347 Shackleton Bailey,” in *Luxoriana*, ed. F. Bertini (Genoa, 2002), 29–33. Corroborating Luxorius’s witness is that of Prokopios of Caesarea, who accompanied Belisarios on his campaign against the Vandals in 533. Prokopios describes the Vandals as the most luxurious of all nations: ἐν τε θεάτροις καὶ ἵπποδρομοῖς καὶ τῇ ἄλλῃ εὐπαθείᾳ, καὶ πάντων μάλιστα κυνηγεσίῳ τὰς διατριβὰς ἐποιοῦντο; *History of the Wars* 4.6.7, ed. H. B. Dewing, *Procopius* (London, 1916), 2:256. Archaeological evidence also indicates that the circus was in use into the 6th century. S. P. Ellis and J. H. Humphrey, “Interpretation and Analysis of the Cemetery,” in *Circus*, 1:326. Archaeological evidence on the amphitheater is less clear, as discussed briefly in D. L. Bomgardner, *The Story of the Roman Amphitheatre* (London, 2000), 143–46.

8 Christian leaders condemned all spectacles equally. The refusal to distinguish between spectacles has been cited as a reason why anti-spectacle polemics failed: “en règle générale, un spectacle licencieux reçoit un blâme aussi grand qu’un spectacle criminel, et ces deux derniers ne sont pas plus blâmés que la course de chars, par exemple, qui n’est ni criminelle ni licencieuse. La condamnation des prédicateurs était trop totale pour être suivie”; G. Ville, “Les jeux de gladiateurs dans l’empire chrétien,” *MélRome* 72 (1960): 295.

9 See the “Note on the Chronology of Augustine’s Statements on Spectacles,” in R. A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge, 1990), 121–23. “It is noteworthy,” writes Markus, “that a very high proportion of these sermons were preached at Carthage” (p. 123). Although not all the Augustine sermons I cite in this study were delivered at Carthage, and the context in which the sermons were delivered is important, Augustine’s attitude toward spectacles is undoubtedly heavily influenced by their performance in this premier African city. As A.-G. Hamman notes, “Il est facile de constater qu’Augustin parle des spectacles surtout à Carthage”; *La vie quotidienne en Afrique du Nord au temps de Saint Augustin* (Paris, 1979), 429 n. 3. Speaking again of Carthage, Hamman writes (p. 147), “C’est en y prêchant que l’évêque d’Hippone est le plus sévère.” Augustine himself attended the Carthaginian spectacles as an adolescent; *De civitate Dei* 2.4. See P. Courcelle, *Recherches sur les Confessions de Saint Augustin* (1950; reprinted Paris, 1968), 52.

Augustine and Quodvultdeus inherited a tradition of polemics that originated in the works of pagan moralists and was thoroughly Christianized by the time of Tertullian.<sup>10</sup> In his *Apologeticum*, Tertullian states that Christians renounce “the madness (*insania*) of the circus” and “the atrocity of the arena.”<sup>11</sup> He elaborates the reasons at length in his treatise *De spectaculis*.<sup>12</sup> The first and main charge: spectacles are rooted in superstitious idolatry.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the spectacles not only began with processions in honor of pagan deities; they also often included dramatic representations of those gods and sacrifices.<sup>14</sup> A mosaic in Smirat, North Africa, exemplifies how the imagery of the circus and amphitheater was intertwined with devotion to the pagan gods. In this third-century piece, the god Bacchus appears in pomp, parading on a circus chariot pulled by some of the more popular beasts of the amphitheater.<sup>15</sup> As part of his attack, Tertullian notes that spectacles are offered to the gods and that the edifices in which they are celebrated include various structures and statues in honor of them.<sup>16</sup> What are these “gods” but the devil and his demons? Hence all spectacles and everything about them, Tertullian insists, are of the devil, whose pomps Christians renounce when receiving the sign of faith in baptism.<sup>17</sup>

In his second major argument against spectacles, Tertullian elaborates how each kind of spectacle is incompatible with Christian discipline. Paraphrasing Ephesians 4:30–31, he notes that “God has instructed us to approach the Holy Spirit—in its very nature tender and sensitive—in tranquility, gentleness, quiet and peace; not in madness, bile, anger and pain to vex it.”<sup>18</sup> Hence spectacles can have no concord with the Holy Spirit and, in fact, hinder the spiritual life; for *furor* reigns in the circus,<sup>19</sup> while cruelty, impiety, and savagery abound in the amphitheater.<sup>20</sup>

Under the influence of Christian emperors, by the early fifth century spectacles had lost many of the trappings of pagan religiosity, even if Christian clergy refused to forget their origins.<sup>21</sup> Yet Tertullian’s second argument, that spectacles contradicted the Christian way of life, remained in use well into the fifth century.

14 In his treatise on spectacles Novatian asks, “Quod enim spectaculum sine idolo, quis ludus sine sacrificio, quod certamen non consecratum mortuo? Quid inter haec christianus fidelis facit, si idolatriam fugit?”; *De spectaculis* 4.2 (*Gli spettacoli*, ed. A. Saggiaro [Bologna, 2001]). Varro, whom Augustine cites frequently as an expert in pagan culture, places *spectacula* under the rubric of “divine affairs” (Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 4.1 [CCSL 47:98–99]). Certain gods played frequent and important roles in spectacles. For the example of Nemesis, see A. Futrell, *Blood in the Arena: The Spectacle of Roman Power* (Austin, 1997), 110, and M. B. Hornum, *Nemesis, the Roman State, and the Games* (Leiden, 1993). In late antiquity, spectacles such as circus races were offered on festivals that commemorated important dates for the ruling dynasty of emperors (linked to emperor worship) as well as festivals in honor of popular gods such as Jupiter and the Sun. For examples, see H. Stern, *Le calendrier du 354: Étude sur son texte et sur*

*ses illustrations* (Paris, 1953), 80, 110. This 4th-century Roman document is problematic in that it lists numerous Christian festivals alongside pagan festivals (see pp. 113–16). Hence it attests to the ambiguity of Christian attitudes toward ostensibly pagan spectacles. The circus games were also closely associated with astrology, divination, and related practices, all of which Christian leaders condemned. Hamman, *La vie quotidienne*, 160 (n. 9 above).

15 M. H. Fantar et al., eds., *La mosaïque en Tunisie* (Paris, 1994), 212. Diana, goddess of the hunt, and Bacchus, tamer of animals, were particularly associated with *venationes*, which is evident also in a similar mosaic from Smirat in modern-day Tunisia, at *ibid.*, 159. See also Slim, “Spectacles,” 215 (n. 6 above).

16 *De spectaculis* 8.1 (SC 332:155–57).

10 For a thorough discussion of pagan moral concerns over the spectacles (primarily gladiatorial fights, but with a good deal of attention to *venationes*), and the continuance of these concerns among Christians, see Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 128–60 (n. 5 above). See also Bomgardner, *Roman Amphitheatre*, 201–4 (n. 7 above).

11 “Nihil est nobis dictu, visu, auditu cum insania circi, cum impudicitia theatri, cum atrocitate arenae, cum xysti vanitate”; *Apologeticum* 38, ed. and trans. T. R. Glover, Loeb Classical Library 250 (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), 172. “The frenzy engendered by partisanship, which drove the Romans to support one or other of the stables, is well known”; R. Auguet, *Cruelty and Civilization: The Roman Games* (New York, 1994), 135.

12 *Les spectacles*, ed. and trans. M. Turcan, SC 332 (Paris, 1986), 29. Another *De spectaculis* (ed. G. F. Diercks, CCSL 4 [Turnhout, 1972], 167–79), heavily influenced by Tertullian, for a time passed under the name of Cyprian; see Turcan, SC 332:62. This second *De spectaculis* was written by Novatian of Rome. S. Prete, “L’antico testamento in Novaziano: *De spectaculis* 10,” *Augustinianum* 22 (1982): 229–31. H. J. Vogt, *Coetus Sanctorum: Der Kirchenbegriff des Novatian und die Geschichte seiner Sonderkirche* (Bonn, 1968), 34, argues that Novatian’s *De spectaculis* was written in 247.

13 In *De spectaculis* 4.3 (SC 332:118) Tertullian sets forth his task of demonstrating that “ex idololatria universam spectaculorum paraturam constare constiterit.” He applies himself to demonstrating the direct ties of each spectacle with idolatry in chapters 5–13. W. Weismann, *Kirche und Schauspiele: Die Schauspiele im Urteil der lateinische Kirchenväter unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Augustin*, Cassiciacum 27 (Würzburg, 1972), 98–103.

17 “Si omnia propter diabolum instituta et ex diaboli rebus instructa monstrauius... hoc erit pompa diaboli aduersus quam in signaculo fidei eieramus”; *De spectaculis* 24.2 (SC 332:282). “Da die heidnischen Götter letztlich nur böse Dämonen sind, werden die Spiele, wie Tertullian folgert, nicht zu Ehren der Götter oder irgendwelcher Verstorbenen, sondern zu Ehren der Dämonen durchgeführt. Die Dämonen haben auch die Einrichtung der Spiele veranlasst und wollen dadurch die Menschen ihrer Ehre dienstbar machen”; Weismann, *Kirche und Schauspiele*, 101–2 (n. 13 above).

18 *De spectaculis* 15.2 (SC 332:226, trans. Turcan, 269).

19 “Etiam a circo ubi proprie furor praesidet”; Tertullian, *De spectaculis* 16.1 (SC 332:232). The late 4th-century Christian poet Prudentius similarly sees the wickedness of the circus in terms of madness, raging, and noise: “nec equum vesania fervida circi auctorem levitatis habet rabidive fragoris: mens vulgi rationis inops, non cursus equorum perfurit: infami studio perit utile donum”; *Hamartigenia*, lines 361–64 (ed. H. J. Thomson, *Prudentius* [Cambridge, Mass., 1949], 1:228).

20 “Si saevitiam, si impietatem, si feritatem permissam nobis contendere possumus, eamus in amphitheatrum”; Tertullian, *De spectaculis* 19.1 (SC 332:252).

21 See the discussion of the difference between the view of the Christian government that secular festivities “could be disassociated from their religious origins,” and the view of Christian clergy, “who were not convinced that secular celebrations could be so clearly disassociated from their ancient religious significance,” in Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, 109 and 120–21 (n. 9 above). Augustine continually associated spectacles with pagan religiosity even after 410: “Quae cum ita sint, cum palam aperteque turpitudines crudelitibus mixtae, opprobria numinum et crimina, siue prodita siue conficta, ipsis expositibus et nisi fieret irascentibus etiam certis et statutis sollemnitatibus consecrata illis et dicata claruerint atque ad omnium oculos, ut imitanda proponerentur, spectanda processerint: quid est, quod idem ipsi daemones, qui se huiusce modi uoluptatibus inmundos esse spiritus confitentur, qui suis flagitiis et facinoribus, siue indicatis siue simulatis, eorumque sibi celebratione petita

ab inpudentibus”; *De civitate Dei* 2.26 (CCSL 47:61). Thus the conviction that Novatian had succinctly expressed with the words, “Idolatria...ludorum omnium mater est,” remained strong (*De spectaculis* 4.4, CCSL 4:171). See also Chuvin, *Chronicle*, 72 (n. 2 above).

## A Carthaginian Obsession

The spectacles flourished in Africa, above all in Tertullian's home city of Carthage. The Carthaginian predilection for spectacles was notorious throughout the empire.<sup>22</sup> The landscape and the archaeological museums in Carthage and its vicinity corroborate this deserved reputation. Carthage boasted "the most important amphitheater in North Africa in antiquity," in both size and prestige, with a seating capacity of about thirty-six thousand.<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile the city's circus was by far the largest in any Roman province; surpassed in dimension only by the circus in Rome, the circus in Carthage seated an audience of perhaps sixty to seventy thousand.<sup>24</sup>

Much decorated terracotta pottery mass-produced in fourth-century Africa depicted themes involving chariot races and beast hunts, including the motif of *damnatio ad bestias* or execution by wild animals.<sup>25</sup> Even more vivid are the numerous surviving mosaics that memorialize the African fascination with animal sports of the circus and amphitheater.<sup>26</sup> These mosaics, of which many are on display in the Musée du Bardo in Tunis, demonstrate how even the names of popular hunters and the beasts they fought, as well as of charioteers and the horses they drove, were impressed in the consciousness of ancient Carthaginians.<sup>27</sup> The draw of spectacles was so powerful that even Alypius, despite his intensely self-possessed temperament, was caught up in "the madness of the circus games" while studying under Augustine at Carthage.<sup>28</sup>

Carthaginians flocked to these spectacles, even on the day the city fell to the Vandals in 439.<sup>29</sup> Shortly before Carthage was taken, its bishop, Quodvultdeus,<sup>30</sup> told his congregation, "The whole province has been put in the midst of such great afflictions and in the very end of its being, but daily the spectacles are frequented: the blood of men is poured out daily on the earth, and the voices of madmen (*insanientium uoces*) resound in the circus."<sup>31</sup> Rather than preparing for war or heroism, the denizens of Carthage took refuge in spectacles as the barbarian horde ravaged their land and approached ever nearer.<sup>32</sup> This news spread even to Gaul, where the presbyter Salvian commented, "Barbarian peoples were sounding their arms around the walls of Cirta and Carthage while the church of Carthage raved (*insaniebat*) in the circuses and reveled in the theaters.... Part of the people was captive of the enemy outside the walls, part was captive of the vice within."<sup>33</sup>

27 Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, 305–6 (n. 22 above). For more examples and discussions of mosaics related to circus racing, see M. Yacoub, "Le fol amour des jeux de cirque," in *La mosaïque en Tunisie*, ed. Fantar et al., 176–85 (n. 15 above), and Slim, "Spectacles," 196–97, 200 (n. 6 above). Slim notes (p. 200), "If we are to judge by the number of mosaics and monuments, the place of the circus in the daily life of the North Africans of the Roman era was still not as great as that of the amphitheater.... Mosaics depicting the animals commonly seen in the amphitheater were by far the most numerous." Shelby Brown studies artistic depictions of blood sports from the 2nd to 4th centuries AD in the Roman world in general, although she uses many examples from the vicinity of Carthage. "Gladiatorial and venatorial

imagery," she writes, "was widespread and available to all social classes. It ranges from prefabricated, standardized representations in inexpensive media, intended for the lower levels of society, to individualized, carefully detailed, and expensive works commissioned by the very wealthy and powerful"; "Death as Decoration: Scenes from the Arena on Roman Domestic Mosaics," in *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome*, ed. A. Richlin (New York, 1992), 181. "From such mosaics we find that boars, bears, bulls, herbivores and felines are represented. Interestingly only big cats and bears are depicted with individual names"; Bomgardner, *Roman Amphitheatre*, 141 (n. 7 above). Boars are also named, although less frequently.

22 "In delectabilibus uero unum solum spectaculum ualde contentiose expectant habitantes: munus. Ipsa autem regio Africae est ualde maxima et bona et diues, homines autem habens non dignos patriae"; *Expositio totius mundi et gentium* 61 (ed. and trans. J. Rougé, SC 124 [Paris, 1966], 203; see the commentary on this passage on pp. 324–25). This text was written originally in Greek (since lost) in the mid-4th century (SC 124:24–26). "The inhabitants of Carthage...had an extraordinary passion for chariot racing, as we know from a variety of sources"; J. H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses: Arenas for Chariot Racing* (London, 1986), 296.

23 Bomgardner, *Roman Amphitheatre*, 128–29, 133–39, 143–46 (n. 7 above), and "An Analytical Study of North African Amphitheaters" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1984), 82.

24 N. Norman, "Le cirque romain," in *Pour sauver Carthage: Exploration et conservation de la cité punique, romaine et byzantine* (Paris, 1992), 162.

25 J. W. Salomonson, *Voluptatem spectandi non perdat sed mutet: Observations sur l'iconographie du martyre en Afrique romaine* (Amsterdam, 1979), 42–43.

26 See, e.g., A. Khader, ed., *Image de pierre: La Tunisie en mosaïque* (Tunis, 2003), figs. 164–66. On the commemorative function of such mosaics see J. W. Salomonson, "Kunstgeschichtliche und ikonographische Untersuchungen zu einem Tonfragment der Sammlung Benaki in Athen," *BABesch* 48 (1973): 29.

28 “Gurges tamen morum Carthaginiensium, quibus nugatoria fervent spectacula, absorbuerat eum in insaniam circensium.... Et compereram quod circum exitiabiliter amaret, et graviter angebar quod tantam spem perditurus vel etiam perdidisse mihi videbatur”; Augustine, *Confessiones* 6.7.11 (ed. M. Simonetti, *Confessioni* [Milan, 1993], 2:110). On the “abduction” of Christians by pagan friends taking them to the spectacles—an experience similar to that of Aurelius, although he was not yet Christian—see Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, 117 n. 33 (n. 9 above).

29 G. G. Lapeyre and A. Pellegrin, *Carthage latine et chrétienne* (Paris, 1950), 33.

30 There has been much debate over the actual authorship of the pseudo-Augustine sermons attributed to Quodvultdeus, which are edited by René Braun in CCSL 60, a number of which I use in this study. The strongest objections to the attributions are found in A. Kappelmacher, “Echte und unechte Predigten Augustins,” *WSt* 49 (1931): 89–102; M. Simonetti, “Studi sulla letteratura cristiana d’Africa in età vandastica,” *Rendiconti dell’istituto lombardo di scienze e lettere, parte generale e atti ufficiali* 84 (1951): 407–24. Simonetti argued that the two sermons *De accedentibus ad gratiam* and *De tempore barbarico II* were by Augustine, and proceeded to divide the remainder among various authors. Simonetti briefly restated his case against some of the sermons years later in *La produzione letteraria latina fra romani e barbari (sec. V–VIII)* (Rome, 1986), 36. For a guide to Simonetti’s conclusions on the authenticity of the sermons see, E. Dekkers and A. Gaar, *Clavis patrum latinorum*, 3rd ed. (Steenbrugge, 1995), 156–59. The attributions have been ably argued and defended by the following: P. Schepens, “Un traité à restituer à saint Quodvultdeus évêque de Carthage au Ve siècle,” *RecSR* 10 (1919): 230–43; idem, “Les oeuvres de saint Quodvultdeus,” *RecSR* 13 (1923): 76–78; G. Morin, “Pour une future édition des opuscules de s. Quodvultdeus évêque de Carthage au Ve siècle,” *RBén* 31 (1914–19): 157–62; D. Franes, *Die Werke des hl. Quodvultdeus Bischofs von Karthago gestorben um 453* (Munich, 1920); M. Heintz, “The First Sermon *De Symbolo* of Quodvultdeus of Carthage, Translated and Annotated, with an Introduction” (MA thesis, Saint John’s Seminary, 1994); and, above all, in R. Braun’s introduction to *Livre*

*des promesses et des prédictions de Dieu*, SC 101–2 (Paris, 1964). For a summary of the largely positive reception of Franes’s study in contemporary reviews, see L. Müller, *The “De Haeresibus” of Saint Augustine: A Translation with an Introduction and Commentary*, Catholic University of America Patristic Studies 90 (Washington, D.C., 1956), 17 n. 33. The attributions have been accepted by prominent scholars such as P. Courcelle; see his *Histoire littéraire des grandes invasions germaniques*, 3rd ed. (Paris, 1964), 127, 138–39. Nor have Kappelmacher and Simonetti’s objections gone unchallenged. C. P. Hammond, for example, notes the implausibility of their opinion “that the description of the sufferings of the captured city in *De temp. barb. II*, v, is a rhetorical flight of fancy”; review of *Opera Quodvultdeus carthaginensi episcopo tributa*, *JThS*, n.s., 29 (1978): 570–71. This debate is more thoroughly discussed in D. Van Slyke, *Quodvultdeus of Carthage: The Apocalyptic Theology of a Roman African in Exile* (Strathfield, Australia, 2003), 21–62. While I support these attributions, my argument does not depend upon their accuracy. No scholars have denied that these works are from the milieu of Catholic Christianity in Africa during the early part of the Vandal invasion, and that milieu is the subject of my investigation.

31 *De tempore barbarico* 1.1.11 (ed. R. Braun, CCSL 60 [Turnholt, 1976], 424), trans. R. G. Kalkmann, “Two Sermons *De tempore barbarico* Attributed to St. Quodvultdeus, Bishop of Carthage” (PhD diss., The Catholic University of America, 1963), 135–36. I have made some minor changes in Kalkmann’s translation.

32 Courcelle, *Histoire littéraire*, 128.

33 *De gubernatione Dei* 6.12 (ed. M. Petschenig, CSEL 8 [Vienna, 1881], 144), my translation. Carthage, Cirta, and Hippo were the only cities to withstand the Vandals’ initial invasion: “vix tres superstites ex innumerabilibus ecclesiis, hoc est Carthaginensem, Hipponensem et Cirtensem, quae Dei beneficio excisae non sunt, et earum permanent civitates, et divino et humano fultae praesidio.” Possidius, *Vita sancti Aurelii Augustini*, 28.7–10 (ed. M. Pellegrino, *Vita di S. Agostino* [Alba, 1955], 150–54).

## *Spectacles and Baptismal Renunciations*

The “church of Carthage” indulged in spectacles despite the exhortations of its bishops against such entertainment. Neither Quodvultdeus nor Augustine composed a sustained attack on spectacles comparable to Tertullian’s *De spectaculis*. Yet their persistent verbal polemics reflect Tertullian’s evaluation: spectacles are incompatible with Christian discipline and are intricately bound with demonic forces. They held that the moral life the Christians swore to live at their baptism is undermined by attending such entertainments.

While early Christian rites of initiation differ greatly from one community or author to the next, from the third century on they all have one thing in common—the renunciation of Satan and everything associated with him.<sup>34</sup> The exact formula of the renunciation varies,<sup>35</sup> but at least from the time of Tertullian, the African rite contains a formal renunciation of the devil and his pomp or pomps.<sup>36</sup> In Augustine’s Hippo and Quodvultdeus’s Carthage, catechumens renounced the devil, his pomps, and his angels at the final penitential vigil or the eighth day before Easter, as well as just before baptism during the Easter Vigil.<sup>37</sup> In light of “the biblical and patristic idea of the worship of idols as being actually the worship of Satan,” the pomps of the devil renounced in various ancient baptismal rites included the spectacles in general, which were held to honor pagan deities, via their referent to the procession of idols that preceded the games.<sup>38</sup> This is a common understanding of renouncing Satan’s pomps among Christian authors from various communities.<sup>39</sup> The consistent use of the word in the African baptismal renunciations well into the fifth century testifies to the ongoing lure of *spectacula* in Roman African culture.<sup>40</sup>

In his second sermon, *De symbolo*, Quodvultdeus teaches that whoever wishes to enter the Church “should renounce the devil, his pomps and his angels. The pomps of the devil are all those illicit lusts that defile the soul rather than adorn it. Such are the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, the ambitions of the age.”<sup>41</sup> One immediately notes a broader meaning of the devil’s “pomps,” as a symbol of the *vanitates saeculi* or of worldly ambitions and desires in general.<sup>42</sup> Yet their reference to the spectacles remains strong. Hence Quodvultdeus explains that the “absurdity (*nugacitas*) of the spectacles” pertains to concupiscence of the eyes.<sup>43</sup> Augustine also sees renunciation of the devil as an important part of the baptismal liturgy<sup>44</sup> and describes the “craving for frivolous shows and spectacles” in terms of concupiscence of the eyes.<sup>45</sup> Quodvultdeus, however, more explicitly connects these themes to prebaptismal renunciations.

At stake are the very norms of Christian life, which, Augustine argues so strongly in *De fide et operibus*, must be clearly taught to and embraced by baptismal candidates before their baptism.<sup>46</sup> The pastoral problem facing these African bishops, however, is that many among the faithful have renounced the world in words, but not in deeds.<sup>47</sup> Hence Quodvultdeus accuses show-going Christians of professing one thing but doing another in light of their baptismal renunciations: “faithful in name, demonstrating something else in deed, not clinging to the faith of your promise, now entering the Church to pour forth prayers, a little later shamelessly shouting at the actors in the spectacles. What do you have to do with the pomps of the devil which you renounced...? Choose to love the Creator of the world and, renouncing the worldly pomps whose prince is the devil with his angels, believe.”<sup>48</sup> Quodvultdeus’s accusation of duplicity is mild compared with the accusation of apostasy leveled by the bold Gallic presbyter Salvian: “In spectacles there is indeed a certain apostasy from the faith and from its Symbol, and a deadly prevarication from the heavenly

34 On the differences among Christian initiation rites in the first three centuries and the gradual emergence of common features, see P. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*, 2nd ed. (New York, 2002), 144–70. On the origin, function, and distribution of the rite of renouncing the devil at baptism, see H. A. Kelly, *The Devil at Baptism: Ritual, Theology, and Drama* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1985), 94–105.

35 For a long and diverse list of ancient formulae *abrenuntiationis* from various authors and liturgical texts that must be considered with due critical judgment, see H. Kirsten, *Die Taufabsage: Eine Untersuchung zu Gestalt und Geschichte der Taufe nach den altkirchlichen Tauf liturgien* (Berlin, 1960), 39–51. One theory proposes a single Hebrew word at the origin of what is found in various ancient formulas as works (*operibus* / τοῖς ἔργοις), pomp (*pompae* or *pompis* / τῇ πομπῇ), angels (*angelis* / τοῖς ἀγγέλοις), or cult (*cultui* / τῇ λατρείᾳ), in M.-E. Boismard, “Je renonce à Satan, à ses pompes, et à ses oeuvres...,” *Lumière et vie* 26 (1956): 249–54.

36 Kelly, *Devil at Baptism*, 96, oversimplifies: “In Africa, from the time of Tertullian onwards, it was the devil, his pomps, and his angels.” Kelly draws from such passages as: “contestamur nos renuntiare diabolo et pompae et angelis eius.” Tertullian, *De corona* 3.2 (ed. A. Gerb, CCL 2 [Turnholt, 1954], 1042). But while Tertullian consistently employs *pompa* in the singular, later African formulas utilize the plural. V. Saxer, *Vie liturgique et quotidienne à Carthage vers le milieu du IIIe siècle: Le témoignage de saint Cyprien et des ses contemporains d’Afrique* (Vatican City, 1969), 122 n. 65. Cyprian’s references to the renunciations used in mid-3rd-century Carthage are inconclusive, but Saxer tentatively suggests (pp. 121–22) that the formula at that time was “Renuntio diabolo et pompis eius et saeculo.”



37 V. Saxer, *Les rites de l'initiation chrétienne du IIe au VIe siècle: Esquisse historique et signification d'après leurs principaux témoins* (Spoleto, 1988), 387, 408–10. W. Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate* (Collegeville, Minn., 1995), 265, 308. There is evidence that the Donatist baptismal liturgy was parallel to that of Augustine and his colleagues, and that Donatists also saw the renunciations as significant to the Christian life. See F. J. Leroy, “Les 22 inédits de la catéchèse donatiste de Vienne: Une édition provisoire,” *Recherches augustinienes* 31 (1999): 149, 154.

38 J. Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1956), 28. The referent of the “poms” was much debated until 1947, when J. H. Waszink, critiquing the scholarship on Tertullian’s use of the word up to that point, convincingly argued: “En voyant l’importance que Tertullien attribue à la pompe du cirque, nous croyons avoir le droit de supposer que ce fut cette pompe, la plus importante de toutes les processions païennes, symbole et des spectacles et de l’idolâtrie, qui ait causé l’insertion du mot dans la formule baptismale”; “*Pompa diaboli*,” *VChr* 1 (1947): 34. Although other sorts of pagan festivals and processions also were encompassed in the renunciation of “poms,” my study focuses on the spectacles. For a discussion of the various public manifestations of pagan cult, see R. L. Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York, 1987), 64–101.

39 Πομπή δὲ διαβόλου ἐστὶ θεατρομανίαι, καὶ ἱποδρομῖαι, καὶ κυνηγεία, καὶ πᾶσα τοιαύτη ματαιότης. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis mystagogica* 1.6 (ed. P. Paris and A. Piedagnel, SC 126 bis [Paris, 1966], 92). John Chrysostom provides the formula for renunciation, including Satan καὶ τῇ πομπῇ σου, in *Catechesis baptismalis* 2.20 (SC 50:145), and explains it as follows in *Ad illuminandos catechesis II* (PG 49:239): πομπή δὲ σατανική ἐστὶ θεάτρα καὶ ἱποδρομῖαι, καὶ πᾶσα ἁμαρτία καὶ παρατήρησις ἡμερῶν, καὶ κληδόνες καὶ σύμβολα. See the examples of pagan authors who use *pompa* to indicate “the processions at the Circensian games, in which images of the gods were carried,” in C. T. Lewis, *A Latin Dictionary Founded on Andrews’ Edition of Freund’s Latin Dictionary* (Oxford, 1996), s.v. *pompa*. See also the similar examples provided to illustrate the word’s definition as “a ceremonial procession (to celebrate a festival, triumph, or sim.),” found in P. G. W. Glare, ed., *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford, 1996), s.v.

40 “The many references in the writings of the Fathers to the renunciation of Satan demonstrate the great impact that the ceremony made upon the Christian community; and the varied forms in which it appeared show that the formulas and services were constantly adapted in order to make the repudiation of the things of this world, and of the evil genius who ruled over them, more meaningful to the faithful”; Kelly, *Devil at Baptism*, 104 (n. 34 above). While the first assertion is true, the second assertion should be modified. As Kirsten, *Die Taufabsage*, 52 (n. 35 above) notes, the formula renouncing the devils’ “poms” is the most persistent, for it is found in baptismal rites from many geographical locations and throughout the centuries.

41 2.1.3–4 (CCSL 60:335), my translation.

42 Waszink, “*Pompa diaboli*,” 36 (n. 38 above). The baptismal renunciations lent themselves to such interpretations: “Si renuntiasti diabulo et operibus eius, quid eum lascive uiuendo repetis?”; *Sermo de centesima, sexagesima, tricesima* (ed. A. Hamman, PLS 1 [Paris, 1958], 62). This pseudo-Cyprian sermon was written in Africa in the 4th century (Dekkers and Gaar, *Clavis*, 19–20 [n. 30 above]).

43 “Ad concupiscentiam carnis pertinent illecebrae uoluptatis: ad concupiscentiam oculorum, nugacitas spectaculorum: ad ambitionem saeculi, insana superbia”; *De symbolo* 2.1.5 (CCSL 60:335). “Sed si te pompa illa, figurae equorum, compositio curruum, ornatus et aurigae superstantis, equos regentis, uincere cupientis; si haec te, ut dixi, pompa delectat, nec hanc tibi denegavit, qui pompis diaboli renuntiare praecepit”; *ibid.* 1.2.7 (CCSL 60:307–8).

44 *Sermo* 216.6.10–11 (PL 38:1080, 1082) and *De gratia Christi et de peccato originali* 2.40.45.

45 “Quae mala facit turpis curiositas, concupiscentia vana oculorum, aviditas nugacium spectaculorum...!”; *Sermo XIV, in natali Cypriani martyris* 3 (PL 46:864).

46 “moribus ad christianam vitam pertinentibus”; 13.19 (ed. J. Zycha, CSEL 41 [Prague, 1942], 59). In this work Augustine refutes unnamed persons who believe that the rules of Christian behavior should be taught after baptism rather than before, at least to those living in adultery (that is, those having remarried after a divorce).

47 “qui autem saeculo saltem uerbis, etiamsi non factis, renuntiant, ueniunt quidem et inter tritum seminantur”; *ibid.*, 17.31 (CSEL 41:75). Augustine stresses that such persons are not assured of salvation simply because they have been baptized: “sed potius sanam doctrinam dei magistri in utroque teneamus, ut sancto baptismo consona sit uita christiana nec cuiquam homini, si utrumlibet defuerit, uita promittatur aeterna”; *ibid.*, 26.48 (CSEL 41:93).

48 *De symbolo* 3.1.13–14, 21 (CCSL 60:350–51), my translation.

sacraments. For what is the first confession of Christians in saving baptism? What is it except that they proclaim they are renouncing the devil and his pomps and spectacles and works? Therefore, according to our profession, spectacles and pomps are works of the devil.”<sup>49</sup> Salvian continues, “The devil is in his spectacles and in his pomps. Therefore, when we return to the spectacles of the devil, we forsake the faith of Christ.”<sup>50</sup>

Prudently refraining from accusing a rather significant portion of his flock of apostasy, Quodvultdeus instead warns them that they are accumulating wrath that will damn them on the day of judgment. He pictures the devil on that day arguing before the most just Judge that this particular Christian belongs to him, because the Christian now fleeing to God had formerly embraced the things of the devil: “For what was he doing in the circus, and why was he uttering there mad contentions (*furiosas lites*), insane voices (*insanas uoces*), and inane victories (*inanesque uictorias*) while at the same time claiming these things alien from himself? What was he doing in the theaters, a renouncer of filthy pleasures? Why was he watching the cruelties in the amphitheater with his own eyes?”<sup>51</sup> Christians who attend the spectacles fail to live out their baptismal renunciations, thereby providing the devil with material for their prosecution on judgment day.

### *Wherein Lies the Danger?*

For Augustine, a Christian cannot condone attendance at the spectacles.<sup>52</sup> Episcopal opposition to spectacles was so great that in smaller, more thoroughly Christianized African towns they ceased altogether.<sup>53</sup> Why, in the twilight of the Western empire, when paganism was clearly in decline, did Christian moralists continue to attack animal spectacles?<sup>54</sup> There remained three major objections. First, the actors in the spectacles are disreputable characters who should not be imitated and, therefore, should not be observed. Second, the spectacles incite various vices, from cruelty to levity, in their viewers. Third, offering such shows entails wasteful and extravagant expenditure.

Regarding the first objection, Augustine exposes the hypocrisy of Christians who consider themselves reputable but who seek entertainment by disreputable charioteers and beast-fighters. “Why demand what you accuse? I marvel if the infamy of the one you love does not stain you.”<sup>55</sup> The three main characters in the spectacles popular in Africa were the *auriga* or charioteer, the *venator* or beast-fighter, and the *scenicus* or musician whose melodies accompanied the action. They were all disreputable from the perspective of the Roman citizen.<sup>56</sup> That early Christians thought the actors in the games were utterly corrupt is evident in the prohibitions against the baptism of chariot racers, gladiators, or others associated with spectacles. Like prostitutes, they must quit their professions before initiation into the faith.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, as mentioned above, beast-fighters

49 *De gubernatione Dei* 6.6 (CSEL 8:133), my translation. Novatian used similarly extreme language: “Et cum semel illi renuntiando rescissa sit res omnis in baptisate, dum post Christum ad diaboli spectaculum uadit, Christo tamquam diabolo renuntiat”; *De spectaculis* 4.3 (CCSL 4:171).

50 *De gubernatione Dei* 6.6 (CSEL 8:133–34), trans. J. F. O’Sullivan, *The Writings of Salvian the Presbyter* (New York, 1947), 161–62.

51 *Contra Iudaeos paganos et Arrianos* 4.8 (CCSL 60:231–32), my translation. As examples cited elsewhere in this paper from Tertullian and Augustine indicate, the “cruelty” or “raging” of the arena and the “insanity” of the circus are commonplaces of Latin Christian rhetoric. Cf.: “habeat sibi Roma suos tumultus, harena saeviat, circus insaniat...” Jerome, *Epistula* 43.3 (ed. I Hilberg, CSEL 54 [Vienna, 1950], 321).

52 “Absit ergo ut dicamus uobis: ‘Vivite ut uultis, securi estote...Et si spectaculis uolueritis oblectare animos uestros, ite; quid mali est?’”; *Sermo* 46.3.8 (CCSL 41:534).

53 Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, 115–16 (n. 9 above).

54 Augustine’s harsh polemics against spectacles occur only after the years 399–401, when government oppression of paganism peaked in North Africa. See Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, 115–16, 118–19, and 121. Asking this same question about gladiatorial games, Ville suggests three reasons why they were forbidden: (1) their bloody character develops cruelty in the spectators; (2) the environment is thoroughly demonic; (3) running the shows entails massive wasteful consumption (Ville, “Les jeux de gladiateurs,” 291–93 [n. 8 above]). Ville’s conclusions are in general valid, but his study lacks spatial and temporal focus.

55 *Sermo XIV, in natali Cypriani martyris* 3 (PL 46:864), my translation.

56 “Sed delectat auriga, delectat venator, delectat scenicus. Itane honestum delectat turpitude?”; *ibid.* The *auriga* and the *venator*, along with the *historio* or actor, are also the objects of the misguided affections Augustine attacks in *Enarratio in psalmum* 39.8 (CCSL 38:430–31); Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 149 (n. 5 above).

57 “Meretrices et histriones et quilibet alii publicae turpitudinis professores nisi solutis aut disruptis talibus uinculis ad christiana sacramenta non permittuntur accedere”; Augustine, *De fide et operibus*, 18.33 (CSEL 41:78). For an earlier and even more explicit prohibition, see Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* 16 (SC 11:71–73).

were often condemned criminals. African Christians might also recall the role that beast-fighters played in the execution of popular martyrs *damnati ad bestias* such as Perpetua and Felicity, although the memory of martyrdom in the arena does not appear in fifth-century Christian polemic against spectacles.<sup>58</sup>

Still with a view to their disreputable actors, Augustine preaches against spectacles even though he is certain that many in the congregation resent his attacks on their favorite pastimes: “Do I dare to forbid spectacles? Do I dare to forbid? I certainly do dare. This very place gives me the confidence, and He who established me in this place. Could the holy martyr [Cyprian] endure the raging pagans, while I do not dare to instruct listening Christians? Shall I fear unspoken feelings of displeasure while he defied open rages?”<sup>59</sup> Thus Augustine exhorts his congregation, “spectacula muta mecum” (change your spectacles with me)! He invites them to contemplate “with the mind” the holy spectacle of Cyprian’s martyrdom. In this case, in contrast with secular spectacles, the actor is worthy of imitation.<sup>60</sup>

No arguments against spectacles were based on humanitarian feelings or sympathy with the charioteers who were trampled under horses’ hooves or with the beast-fighters and animals that were brutally killed in the shows.<sup>61</sup> From this perspective Christian leaders were no more moved than the pagan aristocracy, who overwhelmingly approved of the spectacles.<sup>62</sup> Occasionally humanitarian concerns are evident. For example Augustine notes that the actors owe their misery in part to the demands of the audience: “And these miserable ones themselves have been doomed by the cupidity, by the insane pleasures (*insanientibus voluptatibus*) of the spectators. Remove all these, and they are liberated. The one who refuses to watch shows them mercy.”<sup>63</sup> But this is never the main force behind polemic against spectacles. The primary concern for these pastors is the adverse effect that watching spectacles has on the Christian spectator.<sup>64</sup> The “absurdity of the spectacles” (*nugacitas spectaculorum*) is a fever of your soul, Augustine tells his congregation—like avarice, lust, or hatred.<sup>65</sup> This, then, is the second major argument against spectacles set forth in fifth-century North Africa: the shows incite vice in their audience; like a fever, they waste away the Christian soul.

A fuller description of this fever is given by Lactantius, an earlier author who influenced both Augustine and Quodvultdeus,<sup>66</sup> and with whom both surely agree on this matter. The spectacles, writes Lactantius,

*are very great inciters of the vices and are very powerful for the corrupting of the mind; they ought to be removed by us because they not only add nothing to the happy life, but also cause much harm. For, although a man be condemned deservedly, whoever reckons it a pleasure for him to have his throat cut in his sight defiles his own conscience, just as surely as if he were a spectator and participant of a murder which is performed secretly.... I ask now whether they can be pious and just men who, not only allow those who are set up under the mark of death and who plead for mercy to be killed, but who even demand it; and who, neither sated with wounds nor content with blood, bring to the death cruel and inhuman assent.*<sup>67</sup>

67 *Diuiinarum institutionum* 6.20 (ed. S. Brandt and G. Laubmann, CSEL 19 [Prague, 1890], 557–58), trans. M. F. McDonald, *The Divine Institutes* (Washington, D.C., 1964), 451.

58 “Ad hoc populus exasperatus flagellis eos uexari per ordinem uenatorum postulauit”; *Passio sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* 18.9 (ed. and trans. J. Amat, SC 417 [Paris, 1996], 168). On the execution of those *damnati ad bestias*, see Brown, “Death as Decoration,” 185 (n. 27 above). “Les chrétiens d’Afrique gardaient dans leur mémoire le souvenir de leurs martyrs, Félicité, Perpétue surtout, qui, dans le soleil de mars, à Carthage, avaient été ainsi jetées à la curée d’un peuple déchainé”; Hamman, *La vie quotidienne*, 156 (n. 9 above).

59 *Sermo XIV, in natali Cypriani martyris* 3 (PL 46:864–65), my translation.

60 Ibid. (PL 46:864).

61 “Romans did not typically see the images that bother us—or the practices behind them—the same way we do: with empathy for the victim. The mosaics [of blood sports] instead emphasize the distance of patron and audience from those whose deaths they enforced or delayed”; Brown, “Death as Decoration,” 208, also 185.

62 Auguet, *Cruelty and Civilization*, 194–97 (n. 11 above); Brown, “Death as Decoration,” 185; MacMullen, “What Difference?” 148 (n. 5 above); Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 139–40 (n. 5 above). On the attitudes and the motives of the “approving audience” in general, see Coleman, “Fatal Charades,” 57–59 (n. 1 above).

63 *Sermo XIV, in natali Cypriani martyris* 3 (PL 46:864), my translation.

64 Wiedemann, *Emperors and Gladiators*, 147–48.

65 “Sic avaritia, sic libido, sic odium, concupiscentia, luxuria, sic nugacitas spectaculorum, febres sunt animae tuae”; *Sermo* 9.8.10 (PL 38:83).

66 Augustine’s knowledge of Lactantius’s *Divine Institutes* is evident in various places, for example *De civitate Dei* 18.23 (CCSL 48:614–15). For Quodvultdeus’s knowledge of Lactantius, see Van Slyke, *Quodvultdeus of Carthage*, 232–36 (n. 30 above).

Here again a trace of humanitarian concern is evident, but is clearly secondary. Thus Lactantius mentions that those who die in the spectacles are, for the most part, justly condemned.<sup>68</sup>

As with Augustine, Lactantius is concerned mainly with the effects of the games on the spectator. But, unlike Augustine and Quodvultdeus, Lactantius addresses the gladiatorial games, along with the public execution of criminals.<sup>69</sup> When he speaks of the circus, he is entirely concerned with its effect on the spectator: “The purpose of circus games also aims at what else but levity, vanity, and madness (*leuitatem uanitatem insaniam*)? Minds are stirred into fury with as great an impetus as people rush there, so that those who come for the sake of watching exhibit more of a spectacle when they begin to shout and get carried away and leap about.”<sup>70</sup> Hence he concludes, “All spectacles, then, ought to be avoided, not only lest any of their vices seep into hearts which ought to be quiet and peaceful, but lest the customariness of this pleasure charm us and turn us away from God and good works.”<sup>71</sup>

### *Competition for a Congregation*

Many African Christians took their baptismal renunciations and the effects of watching spectacles less seriously than did their bishops. Not only did they continue to attend spectacles, but they also preferred them to ecclesiastical services that were offered at the same time.<sup>72</sup> Hence the *Register of the Church of Carthage* forbids spectacles on Sundays or important ecclesiastical feasts, noting that people would rather attend shows than church services.<sup>73</sup> On skipping church for spectacles, Augustine preaches to the choir in his exposition of Psalm 39, which he might have delivered in Carthage in 411:<sup>74</sup> “Let there be but a public show on offer, and many of these make for the amphitheater. These are ‘beyond reckoning,’ outside the number. But we are saying this in the hope that they might become part of the number; they will not hear it from us, because they are not present, but when you go home make sure they hear it

68 In 177 CE, Athenagoras defended Christians from the accusation of cannibalism by noting that Christians refuse even to watch those justly condemned to death die in the amphitheater: “Who can charge people with murder and cannibalism who are known not to allow themselves to be spectators at the slaying of a man even when he has been justly condemned? Who among you does not enthusiastically follow the gladiatorial contests or animal fights especially those which you yourselves sponsor? But since we regard seeing a man slain as [the] next thing to murdering him, we have renounced such spectacles”; Athenagoras, *Legatio* 35.4–5 (ed. and trans. W. R. Schoedel, *Legatio and De Resurrectione* [Oxford, 1972], 85). For a more recent edition (1992), see SC 379 by B. Pouderon, who notes (p. 203 n. 2) that the spectacles were more violently condemned by the Greek fathers than by the Latin fathers, including Tertullian, “qui reconnaît la difficulté de faire admettre cette condamnation.”

69 Cyprian also refers to gladiatorial games when he writes, “homo occiditur in hominis uoluptatem, et ut quis posit occidere, peritia est, usus est, ars est: scelus non tantum geritur sed docetur. Quid potest inhumanus, quid acerbis dici?”; *Ad Donatum* 7 (CSEL 3.1:8).

70 *Diuiinarum institutionum* 6.20 (CSEL 19:561), trans. McDonald, 454 (n. 67 above).

71 Ibid.

72 This was also a problem in other parts of the empire, including Gaul, Italy, and Constantinople. “Si quando enim euenerit, quod scilicet saepe euenit, ut eodem die et festiuitas ecclesiastica et ludi publici agantur, quaero ab omnium conscientia, quis locus maiores Christianorum uirorum copias habeat, cauea ludi publici an atrium dei”; Salvian, *De gubernatione Dei* 6.7 (CSEL 8:135). “Pudet dicere, sed necesse est non tacere: plus inpenditur daemoniis quam apostolis, et maiorem obtinent frequentiam insana spectacula quam beata martyria. Quis hanc urbem reformauit saluti? Quis a captiuitate eruit? Quis a caede defendit? Ludus Circensium, an cura sanctorum”; Leo I, *Tractatus* 84.1 (ed. A. Chavasse, CCSL 138A [Turnholt, 1973], 525). In mid-3rd-century Rome, members of Novatian’s community argued that scripture does

not condemn spectacles: “Censuram scripturarum caelestium in aduocationem criminum conuertunt, quasi sine culpa innocens spectaculorum ad remissionem animi appetatur uoluptas”; *De spectaculis* 1.3 (CCSL 4:168). “Πάλιν ἰπποδρομαὶ καὶ θέατρα σατανικά, καὶ ὁ σύλλογος ἡμῖν ἐλάττων γίνεται”; John Chrysostom, *Catechesis baptismalis* 4.1 (SC 50:215; see also sections 5 and 14–15, on pp. 217–18 and 222).

73 “Necnon et illud petendum, ut spectacula theatrorum ceterorumque ludorum die dominica uel ceteris religionis christianae diebus celeberrimis amoueantur; maxime quia sanctae paschae octauarum die populi ad circum magis quam ad ecclesias conueniunt”; *Registri ecclesiae Carthaginensis excerpta* 61 (CCSL 149:197). The emperor passed a similar, although more detailed, law in 425: “Dominico, qui septimanae totius primus est dies, et natali adque epifaniorum Christi, paschae etiam

et quinquagesimae diebus, quamdiu caelestis lumen lavacri imitantia novam sancti baptismatis lucem vestimenta testantur, quo tempore et commemoratio apostolicae passionis totius Christianitatis magistrae a cunctis iure celebratur, omni theatrorum adque circensium voluptate per universas urbes earundem populis denegata totae Christianorum ac fidelium mentes dei cultibus occupentur”; *CTh* 15.5.5 (1.2:820).

74 The scholarly disagreement on this point is discussed in O. Perler, *Les voyages de saint Augustin* (Paris, 1969), 295.

from you.”<sup>75</sup> Quodvultdeus and Augustine often found themselves competing for a congregation against spectacles. Rather than offering prayers in the house of God, Augustine complains in a sermon certainly delivered in Carthage, African Christians offer incense to demons within their hearts as they attend the shows.<sup>76</sup> Quodvultdeus similarly warns parents to reprimand their children, who presumably are not present to hear his sermon, and call them back from the spectacles.<sup>77</sup> Elsewhere he advises his congregation not to wander astray “by frequenting the spectacles and forsaking the church.”<sup>78</sup>

Spectacles offered in celebration of secular or pagan festivals such as the New Year drew many Christians, as Augustine indicated in a Christmas sermon: “The first of January is near at hand. You are all Christians; by the mercy of God, the city is Christian. Two types of men are here—Christians and Jews. May those things that God hates not be done: injustice in games, wickedness in jest.”<sup>79</sup> For Augustine the spectacles are demon worship not so much because of their pagan association as because of the vices they perpetuate, in which demons delight.

*But he [Paul] who said, “I do not want you to become companions of demons” (1 Corinthians 10:20), wished that they were separated in life and morals from those who served demons. For those demons take delight in vain songs, they delight in the absurd spectacle (nugatorio spectaculo), and in the varied indecencies of the theaters, in the madness (insania) of the circus, in the cruelty of the amphitheatre, in the impetuous fights of those who undertake strife (lites) and contention even to a state of lasting enmity for pernicious men, for a mime, for an actor, for a pantomime, for a charioteer, for a hunter (venatore). Doing these things, they seem to offer incense to demons within their hearts. For the seducing spirits rejoice in those seduced; and they feed themselves on the wicked habits and the foul and disreputable life of those whom they have seduced and deceived.*<sup>80</sup>

Expressed this way, the choice is clear: worship God in the church, or worship demons at the spectacles.

In 403, in the Basilica Tricliarum in Carthage, Augustine attacked the motivations of those who provide the shows and thereby squander resources.<sup>81</sup> In an effort to gain “empty honors from men,” the *editor* or sponsor “organizes for them sports of wickedness, sports that pander to evil lusts. He buys showgrounds and bears, he throws his money away on beast-fighters (*bestiaries*), while Christ goes hungry in the poor.”<sup>82</sup> Augustine’s diatribe against the organizers

75 *Enarratio in psalmum* 39.10 (CCSL 38:433), trans. M. Boulding, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, pt. 3, vol. 16, *Expositions of the Psalms*, 33–50 (Hyde Park, N.Y., 2000), 206. For another example, consider the following: “Estote Ierusalem, mementote de quibus dictum est: Domine, in ciuitate tua imaginem ipsorum ad nihilum rediges [Ps. 72:20]. Hi sunt qui modo gaudent talibus pompis; inter illos sunt qui propterea hodie non uenerunt, quia munus est”; *Enarratio in psalmum* 147.7 (ed. D. E. Dekkers and J. Fraipont, CCSL 40 [Turnholt, 1956], 214.4). This sermon may have been delivered in Carthage in 411 (Perler, *Voyages*, 297). On another festival day when spectacles, apparently *venationes*, were offered, Augustine opens his sermon as follows: “Congaudemus frequentiae uestrae, quia ultra quam sperare potuimus, alacriter conuenistis”; *In Iohannis Evangelium tractatus* 7.1 (CCSL 36:67).

76 “Quam multos enim hodie fratres nostros cogitamus et plangimus ire in uanitates et insanias mendaces, negligere quo uocati sunt! Qui si forte in ipso circo aliqua ex causa expauescant, continuo se signant, et stant illic portantes in fronte, unde abscederent si hoc in corde portarent”; *Enarratio in psalmum* 50.1 (CCSL 38:599–600). Perler, *Voyages*, 294–95.

77 “Vides frequentare spectacula, et non reuocas”; *De tempore barbarico* 1.3.19 (CCSL 60:427). Cf. “Pedes occupat quorundam, ut deserta ecclesia frequentent spectacula: nec deest huius astutia desolatoris uel fraudatoris transuentibus iuxta illas nefandas caueas sonos suaues excutere turpissimae uoluptatis, ut illum qui sibi renuntiauerat capiat. Pristina illa opponit oblectamenta ludorum, in quibus aestuantis capiat animum”; *De accedentibus ad gratiam* 1.6.4–5 (CCSL 60:444).

78 “Frequentando spectacula et deserendo ecclesiam”; *De cataclysmo* 2.7 (CCSL 60:410), my translation.

79 *Sermo* 196.4 (PL 38:1020–21), my translation.

80 *Sermo* 198.3 (PL 38:1026), my translation. According to François Dolbeau, sermons 197, 198, and 198A are extracts from one long treatise, which he edits anew from a MS at Mainz, Stadtbibliothek I 9, fols. 219–250v, in “Nouveaux sermons de saint Augustin pour la conversion des païens et des donatistes (IV),” *Recherches augustiniennes* 26 (1992): 69–141.

81 Perler, *Voyages*, 248, 420 (n. 74 above).

82 *Sermo* 32.20 (PL 38:205), trans. E. Hill, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, pt. 3, vol. 2, *Sermons II (20–50) on the Old Testament* (Brooklyn, NY, 1990), 146. Cf.: “Prodigum est popularis

favoris gratia exinanire proprias opes: quod faciunt qui ludis circensibus, vel etiam theatralibus, et muneribus gladiatoris, vel etiam venationibus patrimonium dilapidant suum, ut vincant superiorum celebritates: cum totum illud sit inane, quod agunt; quandoquidem etiam bonorum operum sumptibus immoderatum esse non deceat”; Ambrose, *De officiis* 2.21.109 (ed. I. Tamietti, *Sancti Ambrosii Mediolanensis episcopi De officiis libri tres* [Turin, 1926], 172).

of spectacles addresses, not only wealthy laity who squander their treasures and sell their estates to sponsor spectacles,<sup>83</sup> but also his fellow clergymen. In 419 Augustine attended a council at Carthage<sup>84</sup> that decreed, “The sons of priests<sup>85</sup> not only ought not to sponsor secular spectacles, but also ought not to watch them.”<sup>86</sup> This proscription can be found in several other African councils held in the late fourth and early fifth centuries.<sup>87</sup> Such conciliar legislation reveals not only that Christians were among the spectators of the public entertainments but also that wealthy Christians, including the sons of priests, on occasion sponsored them as a means of ingratiating themselves with the local populace. Even worse, a corrupt African ecclesiastic might employ muscle from the amphitheater or stadium to forward his career—to “carry,” literally, his election to the episcopate.<sup>88</sup>

The social functions of spectacles were complex, but sponsoring and presiding over them was considered an essential and obligatory aspect of civil politics in the imperial period.<sup>89</sup> By sponsoring public entertainments, municipal officials expressed their appreciation for the collectivity that had distinguished them, and in turn secured for themselves future honors.<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, the fact that priests’ sons offered spectacles proves the extent of the clash between the great moralizing bishops and other members of the faithful who did not necessarily consider themselves to be sinning, much less apostatizing from their faith, by attending the shows.

### *The Imagery and Rhetoric of Replacement*

Paul Bradshaw summarizes the opinions of many scholars when he notes that after Constantine the Church “had to employ the language and symbolism of its rivals to enable it to communicate more effectively with the surrounding culture.”<sup>91</sup> “Those responsible for shaping Christian liturgy in the fourth century,” he specifies, “thus found themselves caught between two opposing forces.” The first was the desire to remain countercultural; the second was the need to communicate with the pagan world in its own terms, to inculcate the Church’s liturgy. “After something of a struggle, the second force won the day, for the Church did not know how otherwise to handle the growing flood of new members.”<sup>92</sup> Changes in the attitude of Christian leaders toward spectacles illustrate just this sort of inculturation, although its roots can be traced to a time much earlier than Constantine.

87 For other recensions of the canon cited in the previous note, see CCSL 149:122 and 138. “Vt filii episcoporum et clericorum spectacula saecularia non exhibeant nec exspectent”; *Breuiarium Hipponense* 11 (CCSL 149:37).

88 Such, according to eyewitnesses, is the case with the election of Silvanus to the episcopacy: “Nundinarius dixit: uidi, quia Mutus harenarius tulit eum in collo.... Zenophilus u. c. consularis dixit: uera sunt omnia, quae dicit Nundinarius, quia ab harenariis factus est episcopus Siluanus? Saturninus dixit: uera. Nundinarius dixit: prostibulae illic fuerunt. Zenophilus u. c. consularis Saturnino dixit: harenarii illum gestauerunt? Saturninus dixit: ipsi eum

tulerunt”; *Gesta apud Zenophilum* (ed. C. Ziwsa, CSEL 26 [Prague, 1893], 194).

89 André, *Les loisirs*, 70 (n. 83 above); Coleman, “Fatal Charades,” 50–51 (n. 1 above). “As the Romans saw it, the *munus*... served to fulfill an *editor*’s civic and religious duties and to illustrate his wealth and social status”; Brown, “Death as Decoration,” 184 (n. 27 above). On the epigraphical evidence, see Bomgardner, “North African Amphitheatres,” 87 (n. 23 above).

90 André, *Les loisirs*, 77.

91 *Search for Origins*, 217 (n. 34 above).

92 *Ibid.*, 229.

83 “Cui munus est? cui damnum? Aut unde munus? aut unde damnum? Non enim illi tantum qui talia edunt, damno feriuntur; sed maiori damno percutiuntur, qui talia libenter intuentur. Illorum arca auro exinanitur; istorum pectus iustitiae diuitiis exspoliatur. Plangunt plerique editores, uidentes uillas suas: quomodo debent plangere peccatores, perdentes animas suas!”; *Enarratio in psalmum 147:7* (CCSL 40:283). Even pagan rulers passed laws to limit ruinous expenditures on spectacles. J.-M. André, *Les loisirs en Grèce et à Rome* (Paris, 1984), 78–79. For more on the ruinous expense of spectacles, see Hamman, *La vie quotidienne*, 157–58 (n. 9 above), and P. Plass, *The Game of Death in Ancient Rome: Arena Sport and Political Suicide* (Madison, Wisc., 1995), 50.

84 Perler, *Voyages*, 352.

85 The question of exactly what *sacerdos* means at this period (that is, whether it refers to presbyters or bishops or both) is complex, as illustrated in an index to the CCSL volume containing African councils from 345 to 525, in which this sentence is edited. There C. Munier notes that in a number of passages *sacerdos* seems to refer to both bishops and presbyters: “sacerdos = episcopi et presbyteri, ut uidetur, in locutionibus” (CCSL 149:421). From the late 4th and 5th centuries, the term was used more and more for both presbyters and bishops. On this development, see G. H. Luttonberger, “The Decline of Presbyteral Collegiality and the Growth of the Individualization of the Priesthood (4th–5th Centuries),” *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 48 (1981): 19–24, and J. E. Bifet, “Presbytérat: Du 4<sup>e</sup> au 6<sup>e</sup> siècle,” in *DSP* 12.2:2081.

86 “Vt filii sacerdotum spectacula saecularia non tantum non exhibeant sed nec spectent licet. Et: Hoc semper christianis omnibus interdictum sit ut ubi blasphemia sunt non accedant”; *Canones in causa Apiarii* 15 (CCSL 149:105).

In their competition for souls against the powerful attraction of secular spectacles, African bishops used a rhetorical device pioneered by Tertullian. They recommended the “holy, sane, and most sweet (*sancta, sana, suauissima*) spectacles” of the Church as superior to those of the Roman Empire.<sup>93</sup> Tertullian concluded his *De spectaculis* by recommending spectacles that can be enjoyed by Christians: “Would you have fighting and wrestling? Here they are—things of no small account and plenty of them. See impurity overthrown by chastity, perfidy slain by faith, cruelty crushed by pity, impudence thrown into the shade by modesty; and such are the contests among us, and in them we are crowned. Have you a mind for blood? You have the blood of Christ.”<sup>94</sup> Notice how Tertullian appropriates for the faithful Christian, with biblical precedent, the crown or laurel wreath offered to victorious beast-fighters and charioteers, gladiators and athletes.<sup>95</sup> The victor’s wreath often recurs in African Christian artifacts. Indeed the Victories themselves appear holding laurel wreaths on terracotta tiles that decorated fifth- and sixth-century churches in the vicinity of Carthage. Moreover, laurel wreaths are a common and persistent image in African Christian funerary mosaics.<sup>96</sup>

Augustine and Quodvultdeus employ the rhetorical device used by Tertullian to promote the same spectacles found in the above citation: the passion of Christ and the interior moral struggle of the Christian. Beginning with the former, Augustine goes so far as to portray Christ’s passion as a beast fight like those being offered in the amphitheater, apparently at the same time that this sermon was delivered:

*When the time came for God to have mercy, the Lamb came. What sort of a Lamb whom wolves fear? What sort of a Lamb is it who, when slain, slew a lion? For the devil is called a lion, going about and roaring, seeking whom he may devour. By the blood of the Lamb the lion was vanquished. Behold the spectacles of Christians. And what is more: they with the eyes of the flesh behold vanity, we with the eyes of the heart behold truth. Do not think, brethren, that our Lord God has dismissed us without spectacles; for if there are no spectacles, why have ye come together today? Behold, what we have said you saw, and you exclaimed; you would not have exclaimed if you had not seen. And this is a great thing to see in the whole world, the lion vanquished by the blood of the Lamb; members of Christ delivered from the teeth of the lions, and joined to the body of Christ.*<sup>97</sup>

The victorious lamb, set within a laurel wreath, is visualized in a mosaic that decorated the nave of a fifth-century church about seventy-five kilometers south of Carthage (in modern-day Sidi Abiche). The Christian beast fight, then, is far more remarkable than the secular *venationes*. For in the Christian spectacle the lamb (Christ) slays the lion (the devil)—a sight that surely is never seen in the amphitheater! Quodvultdeus similarly refers to the passion of Christ as a “spectacle.”<sup>98</sup>

But the bishop of Carthage is more interested in scriptural spectacles than those of Christ’s passion or the Christian’s moral struggle.<sup>99</sup> “If you crave the spectacle, you have here the spiritual charioteer, holy Elijah, who was carried to the ends of the sky in a fiery chariot, and the chariots of Pharaoh submerged in the depths. For a *munus* you have holy Daniel conquering the lions not with the sword but with prayer, and bears mauling those who had irritated Elisha the prophet with insults.”<sup>100</sup> Lions and bears, the favorite beasts of the amphitheater, appear in scriptural spectacles, as well as chariots and charioteers, the entertainment of the circus. Yet the spectacles of scripture go far beyond

93 Quodvultdeus, *De symbolo* 1.2.5 (CCSL 60:307).

94 29.5 (SC 332:314–16), trans. Glover, 297 (n. 11 above). On a similar rhetorical technique used by Novatian, see Prete, “L’antico testamento in Novaziano,” 232–33 (n. 12 above).

95 For examples, see 2 Tim. 4:7–8 and Rev. 2:10. On depictions of the spiritual life as a combat in Latin scripture translations and ancient liturgical sources, see A. Blaise, *Le vocabulaire latin des principaux thèmes liturgiques*, rev. A. Dumas (Turnhout, 1966), 575–76.

96 For an example from Sidi Abiche see Khader, *Image de pierre*, fig. 388 (n. 26 above). The 6th-century tile of the Victories from Bouficha is held at the Musée du Bardo, Tunis.

97 In *Iohannis Evangelium tractatus* 7.6 (ed. R. Willems, CCSL 36 [Turnhout, 1954], 70), trans. J. Gibb and J. Innes, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 1st series, 7:50. The devil is described as a lion in 2 Tim. 4:17 and 1 Pet. 5:8.

98 “Denique in ipse passione uidete spectaculum tanti certaminis”; *De symbolo* 3.5.12 (CCSL 60:357).

99 Along with the “spectacles” of scripture, Novatian offers another alternative “spectacle” that was not used in the rhetoric of Carthaginian Christians: the beauty of the world. “Habet christianus spectacula meliora, si uelit...habet istam mundi pulchritudinem quam uideat atque miretur: solis ortum aspiciat”; *De spectaculis* 9.1 (CCSL 4:177).

100 *Liber promissionum et praedictorum Dei* G.13.16 (CCSL 60:221), my translation. For the same use of Elijah, see *De symbolo* 1.2.8 (CCSL 60:308).

secular spectacles, as Quodvultdeus proposes in his first sermon *De symbolo*: “See in the Acts of the Apostles the man, crippled from birth and unable to walk, whom Peter made to run. See as suddenly healed the man you saw before as crippled. And if you are of sound mind, if you are manifestly levelheaded, and if you find pleasure in what is wholesome, see what you ought to look at, see where you ought to cheer: in the former place, where healthy horses are broken, or in the latter, where broken men are made whole.”<sup>101</sup> Quodvultdeus proceeds at even greater length to recommend alternatives to the beast fights of the amphitheater:

*Let the contests of the amphitheater not seduce or entice the Christian: the more eagerly you hurry off to them, the more stupid you show yourself to be. But further, of the things inflicted on one's vision there—what is not dangerous, what is not bloody—where, as most blessed Cyprian said, harmful desire condemns men to the beasts without a charge? May that harmful desire not lure you, beloved, to look upon that cruel spectacle of two hunters competing with nine bears. May it rather delight you to see one man, our Daniel, overcoming seven lions by prayer.... In the former spectacle, the showman is disappointed if the hunter, who has destroyed many of his beasts, escapes unharmed. In this spectacle of ours, the contest is waged without a sword; Daniel is not harmed, nor is a beast killed.... Our spectacle is remarkable and truly wonderful, in which God provides the assistance, faith is strengthened, innocence fights, holiness wins the victory, and the reward acquired is such that he who conquers receives it, and He who bestows it loses nothing.*<sup>102</sup>

For the sake of public recognition and political advantage, the *editores* of beast fights would spend a large amount of wealth to procure the strongest wild animals (especially lions and bears) and to reward victorious hunters generously.<sup>103</sup> After the spectacle they would commission artists to create elaborate mosaics to memorialize the excitement of the event and their own largesse.<sup>104</sup>

As in the citation above, Christian moralists promoted the holy spectacle of Daniel in the lion's den as more exciting than the secular spectacles of the Roman Empire. Hence this theme is common in African Christian artifacts, as is evident in several surviving terracotta tiles that decorated the ceilings and walls of churches in and around Carthage in the fifth and sixth centuries.<sup>105</sup> Such tiles illustrate that the lion in particular became a favorite decoration of churches, even when not depicted with Daniel.<sup>106</sup> Also depicted are images of beasts or scenes reminiscent of beast fights in the arena, only their setting is the peace of paradise—a remarkable contrast with the violence of the amphitheater depicted in secular mosaics, where animals appear with the weapons that slaughtered them.<sup>107</sup> Paradisal faunal themes are a common feature of mosaics on church floors in and around Carthage, which can take on a zoological character: birds, different types of deer, and sheep are frequently represented.<sup>108</sup> In a sixth-century terracotta tile from Kasserine the theme of Jonah being spewed from the marine monster takes on the characteristics of beast fights, and the same can be said of depictions of Adam and Eve with the serpent, as seen in another tile, roughly contemporary, from Kairouan.<sup>109</sup> Thus, despite their abhorrence of such games, African Christian leaders often appropriate the imagery of the spectacles in the iconography of their churches. In the context of the vehement sermons of Augustine and Quodvultdeus, these Christian artifacts appropriate the imagery of secular animal spectacles, which are meant to divert the faithful to various aspects of Christian faith and life.

101 1.2.5–6 (CCSL 60:307), trans. Heintz, 26–27 (n. 30 above).

102 Ibid. 1.2.23–27 (CCSL 60:309–10), trans. Heintz, 31–32.

103 Auguet, *Cruelty and Civilization*, 28–29, 113 (n. 11 above). On the spiraling cost of procuring beasts for the amphitheater, see Bomgardner, *Roman Amphitheatre*, 211–17 (n. 7 above).

104 See, e.g., Fantar et al., *La mosaïque en Tunisie*, 159–61 (n. 15 above).

105 See Musée du Petit Palais de la Ville de Paris, *De Carthage à Kairouan: 2000 ans d'art et d'histoire en Tunisie* (Paris, 1983), 189, fig. 249. See also Fantar et al., *La mosaïque en Tunisie*, 236, for a fifth-century mausoleum mosaic from Borj el-Yahoudi of Daniel with lions.

106 See, e.g., J. Ferron and M. Pinard, “Plaques de terre cuite préfabriquées d'époque byzantine découvertes à Carthage,” *Cahiers de Byrsa* 2 (1952): 97 and pls. 2, 5.

107 See, e.g., Khader, *Image de pierre*, figs. 182–84 (n. 26 above). A 5th- or 6th-century terracotta tile of herbivores from the region of Kairouan is held at the Museum of Sousse; see also Ferron and Pinard, “Plaques,” pls. 7–9.

108 For examples, see F. Béjaoui, “La mosaïque paléo-chrétienne de Tunisie,” in *La mosaïque en Tunisie*, 222–37 (n. 15 above). An intriguing contrast comes from farther east, where a few ancient church floor mosaics depict not only animals but also hunting scenes. E. Alföldi-Rosenbaum and J. Ward-Perkins, *Justinianic Mosaic Pavements in Cyrenaican Churches* (Rome, 1980), 29, 36–37, 51–58.

109 Kasserine: *DACL* 7.2:2615; Kairouan: *De Carthage à Kairouan*, 187, fig. 245 (n. 105 above).



Augustine vividly exemplifies the “spectacle” of the Christian moral life by combining the metaphor of the Ten Commandments as ten strings on a harp with that of beast hunts in the amphitheater. Whereas in the amphitheater the musicians are distinct from the beast-fighters, the Christian takes on the roles of both the musician and the hunter in an interior battle (*pugna interiore*). “This is not in your spectacles. In those spectacles the hunter is not the same as the zither player; the hunter does one thing, the zither player another: in God’s spectacle they are one. Touch these same ten strings and you kill the wild beasts, you are doing both at once.” He explains further: “Do not such spectacles delight you, where we do not draw the eyes of the sponsor (*editoris*), but the eyes of the Redeemer? *Honor your father and your mother* (Ex. 20:12): you touch the fourth string by showing your parents honor; the beast of impiety has fallen dead. *You shall not commit adultery* (Ex. 20:14): you touch the fifth string; the beast of lust has fallen dead.”<sup>110</sup> Thus the interior struggle of the Christian against vice becomes more exciting, and more pressing, than the beast fights of the amphitheater.<sup>111</sup>

Augustine offers a similar spiritual alternative to the circus races. “You praise the charioteer, you shout to the charioteer, you go mad (*insanis*) over the charioteer. This is vanity, it is deceitful madness (*insania mendax*). ‘It is not,’ you say, ‘nothing is better, nothing is sweeter.’ What do I do with one suffering such a fever?”<sup>112</sup> As an antidote, Augustine proposes Christian spectacles to the man addicted to the shows: “Let us give spectacles for spectacles. And what spectacles are we to give to the Christian man whom we want to call back from those spectacles?”<sup>113</sup> The Christian who is accustomed to applauding the charioteer for his ability to control the four horses should rather earn applause himself by controlling four vices.

With such rhetorical devices, the daily struggles of Christian living are depicted via the imagery of animal sports in the circus and amphitheater. Even more striking is Quodvultdeus’s incorporation of such imagery into the mystagogy of the baptismal rite itself, which constitutes a fourth sort of Christian alternative to secular spectacles.<sup>114</sup> In the course of three sermons on the Symbol or Creed delivered to candidates soon to be baptized, the Carthaginian bishop further employs the image of beast fighting. In the first sermon he notes that the Symbol being given to the catechumens is a remedy against the venom of the serpent: “And as soon as the family of the Redeemer was cleansed, it sang the song of salvation, and took the antidote of the Symbol against the serpent’s venom, so that if the adversary the devil ever wished to lie in ambush again, the redeemed would know that he ought to be met with the mystery of the Symbol and banner of the cross. Thus, clothed with such weapons, the Christian might easily triumph over the most evil devil, who in his wickedness had prevailed before in oppressing him.”<sup>115</sup> The imagery here is martial, although the enemy is portrayed as a beast. In the third sermon Quodvultdeus utilizes imagery more directly drawn from the amphitheater: “And you have received the Symbol, the protection of one in labor against the serpent’s venom. In the Apocalypse of John the Apostle it is written that the dragon stood in the presence of the woman who was about to give birth, that, when she should be delivered, he might devour her child (Revelation 12:4). None of you are unaware that the dragon is the devil; that the woman signified the Virgin Mary, who, inviolate, gave birth to our inviolate Head. The same one who also showed forth in herself the figure of the holy Church.”<sup>116</sup> In this ecclesiological interpretation of Revelation 12:4, Mother Church, figured by Mary, gives birth to the new Christian, whom the devil attempts to devour

110 *Sermo* 9.13 (PL 38:85), my translation.

111 Compare with this pseudo-Dionysios the Areopagite, who also appropriates and spiritualizes the imagery of spectacles to describe a personal conflict faced by the Christian. *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. C. Luibheid (New York, 1987), 207.

112 *Enarratio in psalmum* 39.8 (CCSL 38:430), my translation.

113 “Aurigam laudat regentem quattuor equos, et sine labe atque offensione currentes; forte talia miracula spiritalia non fecit Dominus? Regat luxuriam, regat ignaviam, regat iniustitiam, regat impredentiam...ducatur quo vult, non trahatur quo non vult”; *ibid.* 39.9 (CCSL 38:432), my translation.

114 For baptism as a spectacle in the mystagogical catechesis of John Chrysostom, see E. Mazza, *Mystagogy: A Theology of Liturgy in the Patristic Age*, trans. M. J. O’Connell (New York, 1989), 125. There the spectators include men, but also angels and the Lord himself. Ambrose similarly portrays baptism as an athletic spectacle, a struggle with the world and the devil (*De sacramentis* 2.4–5, CSEL 73:17).

115 *De symbolo* 1.1.9 (CCSL 60:305–6), trans. Heintz, 21–23 (n. 30 above), with minor changes. Cyril of Jerusalem offers an illuminating comparison in *Catechesis III de baptismo* 11–13 (PG 33:441–44). Cyril indicates that the dragon was present in the Jordan River by citing Job 40:18. Hence, in his own baptism, Christ bound the dragon and crushed his head. The newly baptized Christian receives grace and strength to struggle with the enemy just as Christ did during the temptation in the desert following his own baptism. Kelly discusses this passage in *Devil at Baptism*, 145 (n. 34 above).

116 *De symbolo* 3.1.4–5 (CCSL 60:349), my translation.

immediately after baptism. Vigilance is necessary; the newborn Christian, having entered the number of the faithful, must continue the battle against the serpent/dragon/devil even after baptism.<sup>117</sup> For after baptism the words of renunciation must be put into action: “You have said: ‘I renounce.’ Renounce not only with voices, but also with habits; not only with the sound of the tongue, but also with the act of life; not only with resounding lips, but with proclaiming works.”<sup>118</sup> He then explains that baptismal renunciations commit one to avoiding the spectacles. Here two metaphors of beast fighting—the Christian moral life and baptism—meld into one. The Christian life is seen as an ongoing struggle to live out one’s baptismal renunciations, a beast fight with the ancient serpent, against whose venomous bite the Christian has been inoculated by the saving doctrines of the Symbol.

### *Perpetua and Felicity: The Convergence of Themes*

Once again Tertullian anticipates a rhetorical device that would be exploited by the most prominent African bishops of the fifth century: he refers Christians to the holy spectacle of martyrdom. “These are the pleasures, the holy, perpetual, free spectacles of Christians...to glory in the palms of martyrdom.”<sup>119</sup> Fifth-century African bishops appear to delight in offering local martyrs to the view of the faithful.<sup>120</sup> In light of Perpetua and Felicity’s martyrdom, the spectacle of Christian beast fighting becomes far more than a mere metaphor. Quodvultdeus contrasts Eve’s defeat by the serpent-devil with the victory of the famous African martyrs.<sup>121</sup>

*Felicity, however, who had Perpetua as her companion, was in the pains of labor, and after she was thrown to the wild beasts, was joyful rather than fearful.... The devil cast down one Eve; but Christ, who was born of a virgin, exalted many women. Perpetua and Felicity trod underfoot the serpent’s head, which Eve admitted into her heart. The latter he seduced with false promises, the former he could not overcome with fierce raving; the latter he deceived while in the midst of the happiness of the garden, the former he could not assail, even when they were under the power of such mighty enemies. At the fall of the former amid the delights of the garden he rejoiced, and at the constancy of the latter’s bravery in the midst of torments the devil himself, in a manner of speaking, was greatly frightened.*<sup>122</sup>

The influence of the *Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicity* is evident in this passage.<sup>123</sup> The eyewitness author of the martyrdom account<sup>124</sup> neatly portrays the combat of Perpetua and her companions with wild animals within the framework of a spectacle with a specified beginning and a specified ending.<sup>125</sup> Perpetua herself also states clearly, in the first-person account of her dreams,

123 For example, in the *Passio* Perpetua and her companions processed to their martyrdom “si forte gaudio pauentes non timore” (18.1); the *Passio* also highlights Felicity’s swift movement from labor to beast fighting: “Item Felicitas, saluam se peperisse gaudens ut ad bestias pugnaret, a sanguine ad sanguinem, ab obstetrice ad retiarium” (18.3, SC 417:164). See J. Amat, introduction, *Passion de Perpétue et de Félicité*, SC 417 (Paris, 1996), 81.

124 On authorship of the various parts of the *Passio*, see, Amat, introduction, SC 417:67–78.

125 “Itaque in commissione spectacula ipse [Saturninus] et Reuocatus leopardum experti etiam super pulpitum ab urso uexati sunt”; *Passio sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* 19.3 (SC 417:168–70). “Et statim in fine spectacula leopardo eiecto de uno morsu tanto perfusus est sanguine”; *ibid.* 21.2 (SC 417:176). The final throat slitting

117 Cf. “Vigilet itaque unusquisque, ne non ex toto renuntians post professionem, apud eum diabolus suos pannos agnoscat, et incipiat reus semper detineri quem Christus sua gratia uoluit liberari”; Quodvultdeus, *Contra Iudaeos paganos et Arrianos* 4.1 (CCSL 60:230).

118 *De symbolo* 3.1.10–11 (CCSL 60:350), my translation.

119 *De spectaculis* 29.3 (SC 332:310–14), my translation. For Tertullian the greatest Christian spectacles are eschatological; they are especially the Lord’s return and the final judgment. By the early 5th century, this theme was no longer prominent in Christian antispectacle polemics.

120 Knowing the love of Christians for their saints martyred by wild animals, the pagans of Quodvultdeus’s day used such deaths as an argument against the resurrection of the dead. “Hic illa absolendam sese ingerit quaestio quae insipientium gentili-umque ore profertur, quomodo resurgant hi quorum cadauera beluae bestiaeque comederint ipsaeque ab aliis bestiis, auibus canibusque consumptae sint”; Quodvultdeus, *Liber promissionum et praedictorum Dei* D.18.29 (CCSL 60:211).

121 For Augustine’s interpretation of the *Passio*, see K. Steinhauser, “Augustine’s Reading of the *Passio Sanctorum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*,” *StP* 33 (Leuven, 1997), 244–49, and Salisbury, *Perpetua’s Passion*, 172–76 (n. 2 above). Salisbury, who also pays some attention to Quodvultdeus, provides a feminist critique of the juxtaposition of Perpetua and Eve.

122 *De tempore barbarico* 1.5.4–8 (CCSL 60:431), trans. Kalkmann, 147–48 (n. 31 above), with minor emendations. Augustine refers to Stephen’s martyrdom as a great spectacle (*spectemus magnum spectaculum*) and describes him as *athleta Christi* in *Sermo* 49.10.11 (PL 38:325).

of the condemned followed after they were mauled by the beasts. It was considered outside the purview of the spectacle, although in this case the crowd demanded to see the death blows of those whom the beasts had left alive: “Et cum populus illos in medio postulare, ut gladio penetranti in eorum corpore oculos suos comites homicidii adiungerent, ultro surrexerunt et se quo uolebat populus transtulerunt”; *ibid.*, 21.7 (SC 417:178–80).

"I understood that I would not be fighting against beasts, but against the devil; but I knew that victory is mine."<sup>126</sup>

Thus Quodvultdeus's interpretation of Perpetua's martyrdom comes from the text of the *Passion* itself. Quodvultdeus delivered the sermon cited above shortly after 7 March, the day on which Carthaginian Christians celebrated the martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity, in part by reading the *Passion* in the liturgy.<sup>127</sup> In a sermon delivered on the day of that celebration, possibly also by Quodvultdeus, the following is said of Felicity:<sup>128</sup> "even if she died after prematurely having given birth, nevertheless, having maturely confessed, she was crowned; she had been kept safe after recent childbirth for the feminine fight, in order that she also, even with a languid body, might overcome the devil in the ferocious beasts and in the more ferocious crowds, and that she might prostrate the enemy with torn flesh but with confident faith."<sup>129</sup> In her confession, Felicity is crowned.<sup>130</sup> She progresses from childbirth to beast fighting, and in the crushing of her body she overcomes the devil. Was this sermon delivered in the popular *basilica maior* of Carthage, where the relics of Perpetua and Felicity were interred?<sup>131</sup>

This literary device is paralleled in iconographic representation. J. W. Salomonson, in a fascinating study of imagery in North African pottery, argues convincingly that, in the fourth century, depictions of executions by wild beasts on this medium transformed into scenes of martyrdom.<sup>132</sup> He also notes how Christian depictions of Daniel flanked by lions proceed from pagan iconography indicating the mastery of the "Genius" of life over the forces of death.<sup>133</sup> In this light, Daniel, often depicted with his arms extended in the form of a cross, becomes a type of resurrection and of deliverance from suffering.<sup>134</sup> Thus the passion of Christ converges with the themes of martyrdom and beast fighting.

## Conclusion

Augustine and Quodvultdeus, like Tertullian before them, considered spectacles contrary to Christian discipline and, even worse, concessions to the devil. For them, renouncing the devil and his pomps at baptism entailed renouncing spectacles, whose origins in pagan religiosity they did not forget. Yet in the late-fourth and fifth centuries the influence of paganism was declining. These North African bishops opposed spectacles primarily for three other reasons: first, spectacles are characterized by an inordinate affection for their disreputable actors; second, they entail wasteful expenditure on a massive scale; third, they incite vice—particularly madness (*insania*) in the circus and cruelty in the amphitheater—in the viewer. Especially for this last reason, demons delight in spectacles, even if the pagan trappings of such pomps are greatly diminished.

Many Christians of Carthage, however, either were unimpressed by their baptismal renunciations or understood them differently. They continued to attend the circus and amphitheater, even after Carthage fell to the Vandals. Attempting to attract their straying congregants, the African bishops offered alternative spectacles both rhetorically and in the iconography of their churches. These alternative Christian spectacles took five interrelated forms. The first four were the passion of Christ, the *mirabilia* of Scripture, the interior struggle to live the Christian life, and the rites of initiation. The fifth, and possibly the most striking for the Christians of Carthage, was the martyrdom of their own local ancestors in the faith—admirable actors such as Cyprian, Perpetua, and Felicity, whose *memoriae* could be venerated and whose feast days were

126 Ibid. 10.14 (SC 417:142), my translation.

127 "Ante paucos dies natalitia celebravimus martyrum Perpetuae et Felicitatis, et comitum"; Quodvultdeus, *De tempore barbarico* 1.5.2 (CCSL 60:430). V. Saxer, *Morts, martyrs, reliques en Afrique chrétienne aux premiers siècles: Les témoignages de Tertullien, Cyprien et Augustin à la lumière de l'archéologie africaine* (Paris, 1980), 202.

128 Germain Morin, who transcribed the sermon, thought it should be attributed to Quodvultdeus. G. Morin, *Sancti Aurelii Augustini tractatus sive sermones inediti ex codice Guelferbyitano 4096* (Campoduni, Monaco, 1917), xxx–xxxi. In his pioneering work on the Quodvultdean corpus of writings, D. Franses considered this sermon as one that could possibly be written by Quodvultdeus, pointing out literary parallels with *De tempore barbarico* 1. In the end, however, he believed that the evidence is inconclusive; *Quodvultdeus*, 79–81 (n. 30 above). Dekkers and Gaar, *Clavis*, 159 (n. 30 above), list this sermon among the *dubia* of Quodvultdeus. I am inclined to think Quodvultdeus is indeed the author. Even if he is not, this sermon certainly comes from 5th-century Africa, and most probably from Carthage.

129 *De natale sanctorum Perpetuae et Felicitatis* 3, ed. Morin, *Sancti Aurelii Augustini tractatus*, 197 (see prev. n.), my translation.

130 On the crown as a symbol of the victory of martyrdom, see Blaise, *Vocabulaire latin*, 233–34 (n. 95 above).

131 Victor of Vita, *Historia persecutionis* 1.9 (1.3; CSEL 7:5). Saxer, *Morts, martyrs, reliques*, 182–83 (n. 127 above).

132 For the first statement of this thesis see Salomonson, *Voluptatem spectandi*, 50 (n. 25 above).

133 Ibid., 66–68 (n. 127 above).

134 Ibid., 71. This same symbolism is then extended to other iconographic scenes of martyrdom by wild beasts in the arena (ibid., 82–83).

celebrated yearly by the local community. These martyrs' struggles with the devil were not figurative but rather literal spectacles.

—*Kenrick-Glennon Seminary*